

3 minority caucuses want Coble renounced

House leaders asked to repudiate remarks by N.C. congressman

Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Three minority congressional caucuses asked House leaders Wednesday to denounce remarks by Rep. Howard Coble, R-N.C., defending the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus called on leaders to repudiate the remarks.

"As our country is engaged in a war against terrorism, and is on the brink of a war against Iraq, respect for civil liberties is crucial to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past," the groups said in a letter to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., and Judiciary Committee chairman James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis.

"To demonstrate that you have learned from the Trent Lott experience and the importance of getting history right, we ask you to repudiate Congressman Coble's statements as an inaccurate, misleading and potentially damaging view of history," the letter said.

The caucuses also asked House leaders to pass a resolution that calls for a "Day of Remembrance" for the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

Neither Hastert's nor Sensenbrenner's offices returned telephone messages Wednesday seeking comment.

Coble chief of staff Missy Branson referred only to Coble's written statement of Feb. 10 in which he said, "I regret that many Japanese and Arab Americans found my choice of words offensive because that was certainly not my intent."

In a radio show appearance Feb. 4, Coble disagreed with a caller who said Arab-Americans should be confined, but appeared to defend the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

"We were at war. They were an endangered species," Coble said. "For many of these Japanese-Americans, it wasn't safe for them to be on the street."

Coble said most Japanese-Americans during World War II, like most Arab-Americans today, were not America's enemies, but President Roosevelt had to consider the nation's security.

"Some probably were intent on doing harm to us," he said, "just as some of these Arab-Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us."

The remarks sparked protests from several minority groups and from three Asian-American congressmen: Reps. Mike Honda, D-Calif., Robert Matsui, D-Calif., and David Wu, D-Ore.

The Democratic National Committee has asked Coble to resign as chairman of the House Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security subcommittee.

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